

The Vulnerability of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Informal Settlements in Italy

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Summary

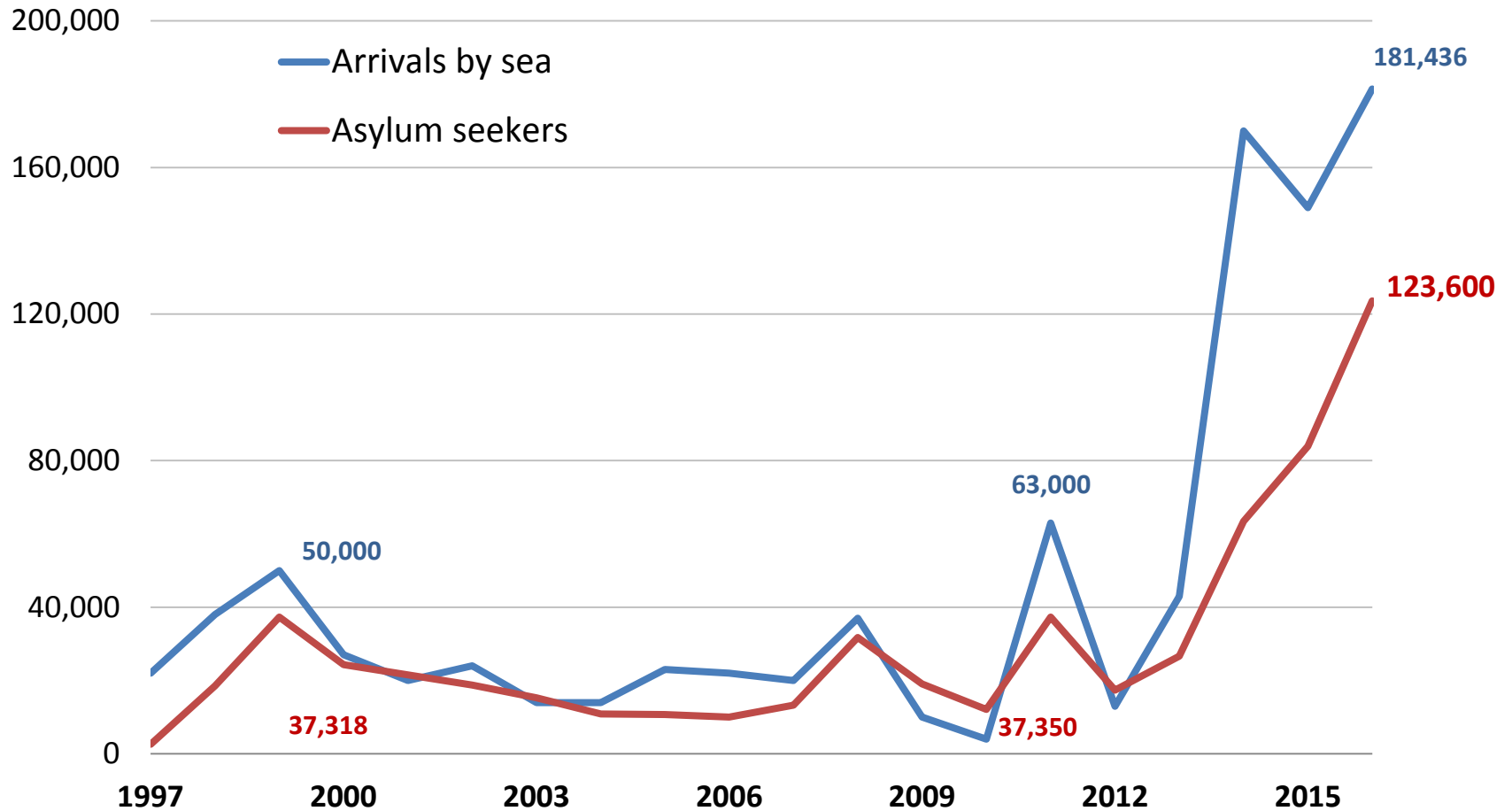
- There are no official statistics on asylum seekers and refugees living in informal settlements in Italy
- We therefore have **very limited knowledge** about this population, their welfare, and their vulnerability
- We develop a **new approach** to measuring vulnerability
- We show that **duration of residence is an important predictor of vulnerability, but only for men**
- Our findings inform **social protection and inclusion** policies
- And our method can be extended to **other contexts**

Acknowledgement and disclaimer

The survey *Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy: Informal Settlements and Social Marginalisation* was conducted by the **Department of Economics, Business and Statistics** (SEAS) of the University of Palermo and **Médecins Sans Frontières** - Italian Section (MSF).

The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of their affiliated organizations or those of MSF.

Arrivals by sea and asylum seekers in Italy (1997-2016)



Source: Data from Ministry of Interior and Italian Commission for Refugees

The Italian reception system

- The Italian **reception system** has not managed to keep up with the growing number of international protection requests through its reception centers
- Places in official and emergency accommodation are limited
- The lack of places has recently become even more critical due to the **lengthening of the period of stay** in the reception system
- **Many asylum seekers and refugees are therefore living in informal settlements**

Vulnerability

According to United Nations (2001) the concept of vulnerability refers to:

“a state of high exposure to certain risks, combined with a reduced ability to protect or defend oneself against those risks and cope with their negative consequences”

Vulnerability implies:

1. Experiencing an adverse event
2. Having a reduced ability to cope
3. Being unable to adapt to a new set of circumstances

Vulnerability assessment

- Traditional vulnerability assessment concentrates on understanding the scope and intensity of the humanitarian situation and the ability of population groups to cope with the effects of such a situation
- The aim is **to identify vulnerable groups and provide targeted assistance** in order to enable them to better cope with the emergency conditions and eventually regain self-sufficiency

(Patel et al 2016; WFP 2016; IFRC 2006)

Vulnerability assessment

- Here, we seek to translate this concept from its typical use in more immediate humanitarian crisis situations in low and middle income receiving-countries...

....to a **high income receiving-country**

See for example WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR (2013) for Syrian refugees in Lebanon; Samuel Hall Consulting (2014) for internally displaced persons in Afghanistan; UNHCR (2015) for Syrian refugees in Jordan; Kaya and Kıraç (2016) for Syrian refugees in Istanbul.

Our method

- **Survey of informal settlements in Italy in 2015**
 - Multistage stratified sample, including weights
 - Sample size = 560
 - These data are used to generate representative statistics
- **Latent trait analysis of vulnerability** (like factor analysis)
 - Used to predict each person's unobserved (latent) vulnerability
 - Creates a continuous variable from observed categorical variables
 - Accounts for measurement error and correlation between items
- **Regression to see which factors are linked with vulnerability**
 - Age, sex, duration of residence, settlement size, and employment

Informal settlements



Definition:
 Sites characterized by self-management and lack of rental fee payment

(e.g. occupied buildings, shacks, containers, tent camps, open-air sites)

Dimensions of vulnerability

- 1. Shelter**
living in a settlement with no accommodation in buildings for all residents
- 2. Objective health**
having had a health problem not met by a formal medical assistance
- 3. Subjective health**
bad or very bad self-reported general health
- 4. Family support**
not having any non-dependent family member living in Italy
- 5. Legal status**
having no current legal right to reside in Italy
- 6. Literacy**
no formal education and no ability to read or write
- 7. Employment**
not in employment in Italy

Key findings

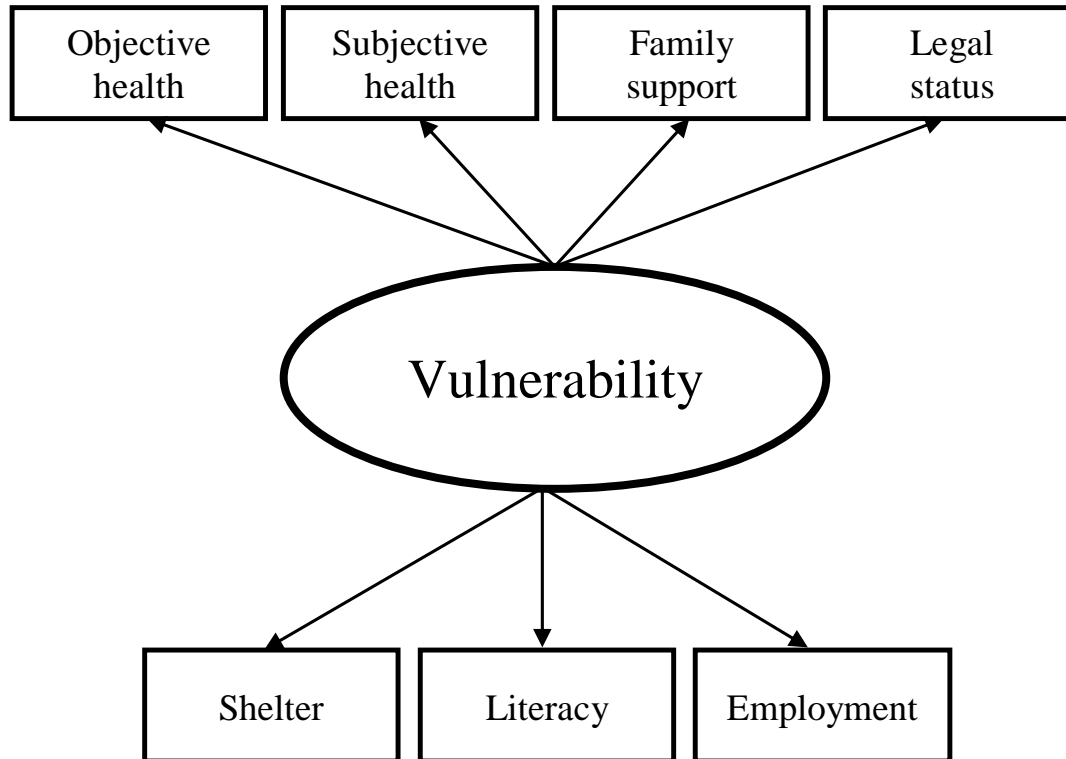
- **Men are more vulnerable** on all indicators, except employment
- Differences by age are not pronounced, but **younger people have worse living conditions**
older people are less likely to have a legal status
- With the exception of legal status,
Africans are less vulnerable than Asians (mainly Afghans and Pakistanis)
- And with the exception of employment,
the least vulnerable live closest to Rome

Questions

How can we describe the overall vulnerability of different individuals and groups?

How can we generalise in order to inform policies and interventions?

Latent trait model



Model:

$$x_{ij} = \alpha_j + \lambda_j \theta_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

where x_{ij} are the 7 items ($j = 1 \dots 7$) for each individual i ,
 θ_i is latent vulnerability, λ_j are factor loadings,
 ε_{ij} are error terms (conditionally independent given θ_i),
and α_j are equation-specific constants

Results

	Latent vulnerability
Male	0.626 ***
Duration (years)	-0.039 ***
Age (years)	-0.002
Smaller settlement	0.426 ***
Job before migration?	0.015
African (ref. Asian)	-0.433 ***
<i>Observations</i>	<i>415</i>

Significantly more
vulnerable if:

- Male
- Recently arrived
- In a smaller settlement
- Asian

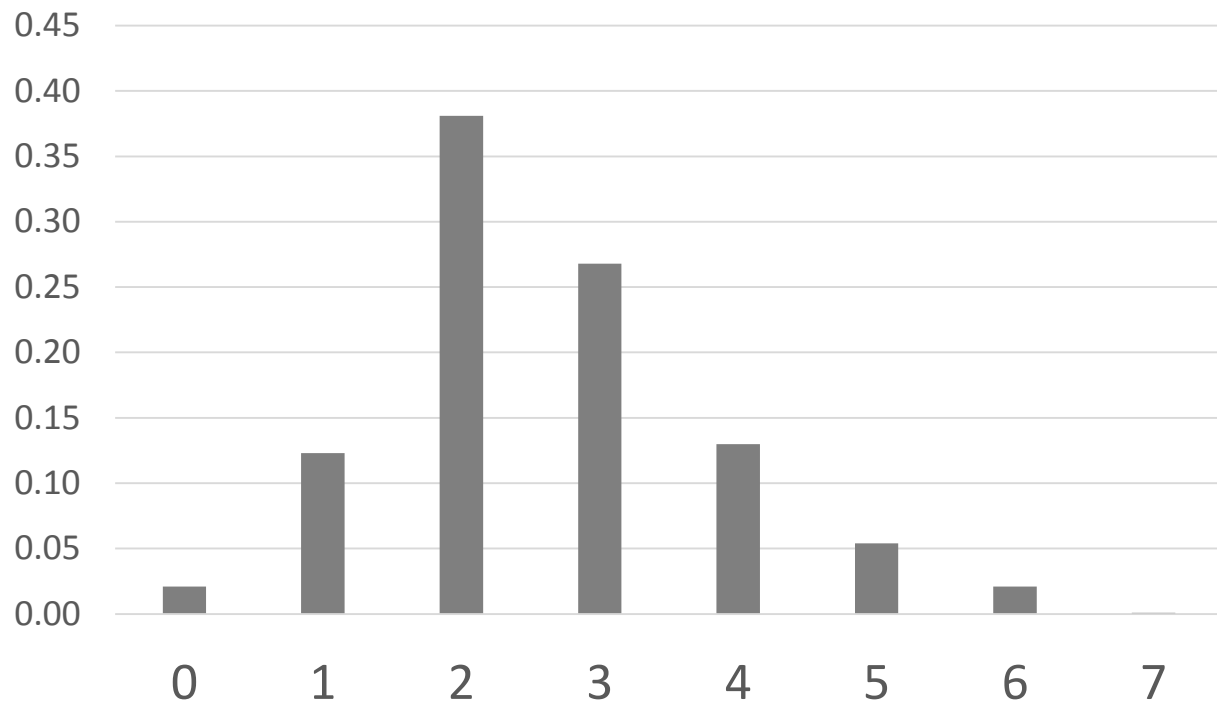
*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Number of vulnerabilities

We can also count the number of vulnerabilities

but this is at best a pragmatic measure, ignoring measurement issues

(especially measurement error and item overlap – e.g. see Hand 2010)



Comparison of methods

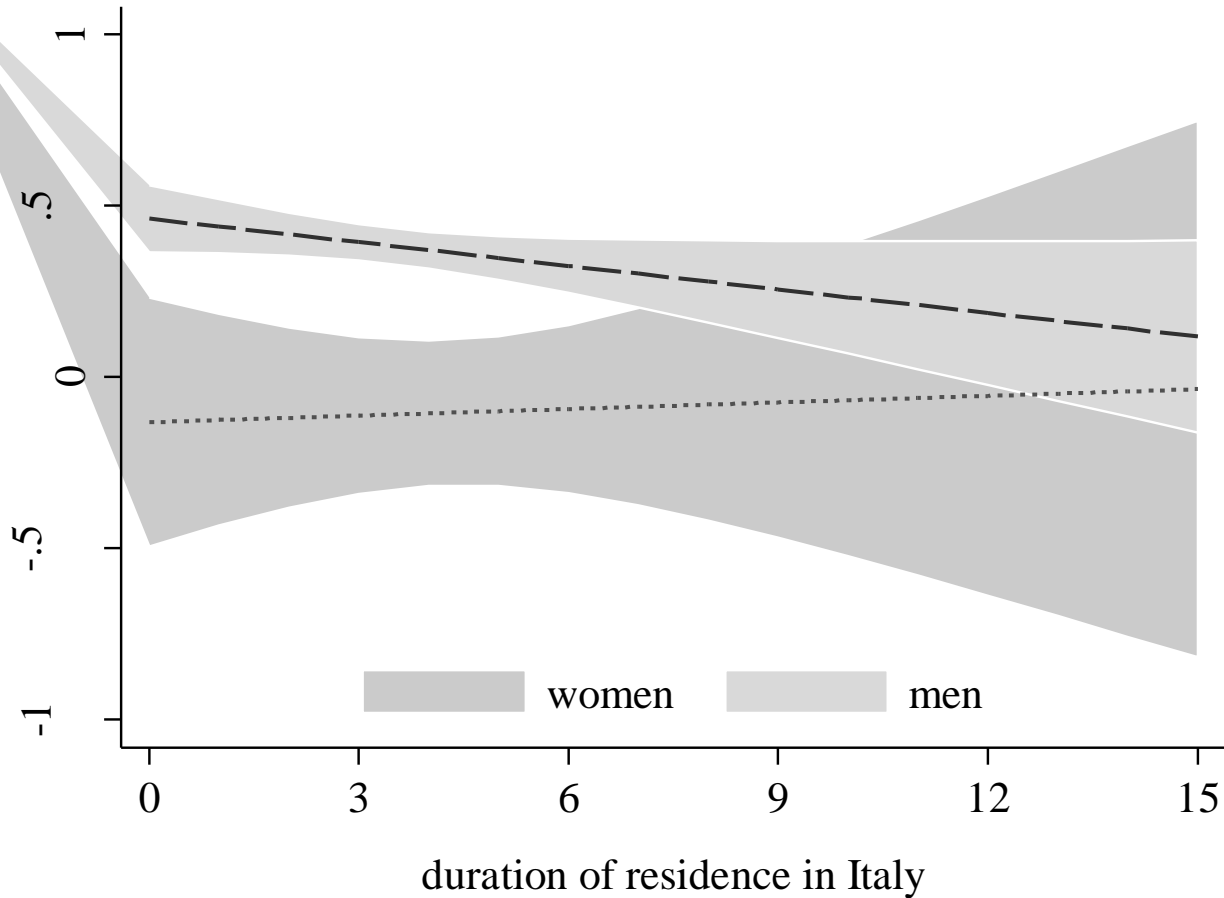
	Latent vulnerability	Count of vulnerability items
Male	0.626 ***	0.380 ***
Duration (years)	-0.039 ***	-0.020
Age (years)	-0.002	0.002
Smaller settlement	0.426 ***	0.142 **
Job before migration?	0.015	-0.010
African (ref. Asian)	-0.433 ***	-0.235 ***
<i>Observations</i>	<i>415</i>	<i>415</i>

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

It makes a difference how we model vulnerability

- Which implies that it is important to consider measurement issues

More results from the latent model



Male refugees and asylum seekers who have been in Italy for longer are less vulnerable

...but the opposite is true for females

Next steps

Reassess the concept of vulnerability

Design and implement a new survey for Italy

Repeat this analysis in other contexts

Thank you

Please contact me with any questions

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Also, see:

[Out of sight: report on asylum seekers and refugees in Italy living in informal settlements](#)